

AUSTRALIA

LANCET COUNTDOWN ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE DATA SHEET 2026

Health and Climate Change in Australia

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change tracks the connections between health and climate change. In its tenth iteration, the 2026 Global Report shows that the health impacts of climate change have escalated, and frequently accelerated, in the decade since the Paris Agreement came into force.

This document draws on findings from the 2026 Lancet Countdown Global Report and the 2026 Lancet Countdown Oceania Report to present key insights for Australia.



Rising heat is increasingly affecting health, sleep, physical activity and people's ability to work in Australia.



Increasing drought conditions are placing pressure on water resources, food production and livelihoods across Australia.



Fossil fuel combustion continues to contribute to harmful air pollution in Australia. Expanding renewable electricity generation and renewable-powered electrification across households and transport can reduce air pollution, protect health and lower greenhouse gas emissions.



Increasing coastal suitability for *Vibrio* transmission and rising estimates of vibriosis cases highlight changing climate-sensitive infectious-disease risks in Australia.

Heat and Health

Exposure to high temperatures increases the risk of heat-related illness and mortality. Vulnerable groups, including older adults, young children, pregnant women, and those with pre-existing conditions, face the greatest risks.

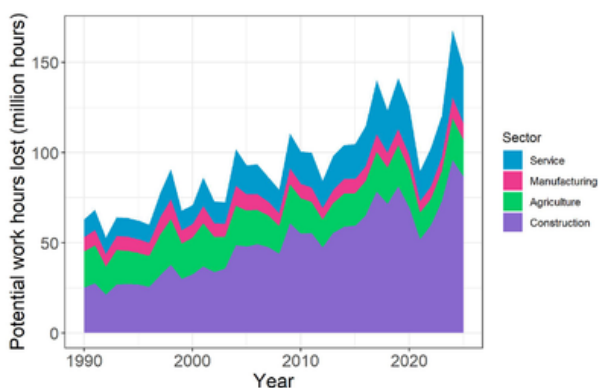


In 2025, 66% of the heatwave days that people in Australia were exposed to on average were directly attributable to climate change. Children under one year of age and adults over 65 in Australia experienced an average of approximately 4.6 heatwave days per year between 2016 and 2025, an increase of 66% and 69%, respectively, compared with 1986–2005. (Indicator 1.1.1)



People in Australia were exposed to an average of 435 hours per year in which heat posed a moderate or higher risk of heat stress during moderate outdoor physical activity (e.g., brisk walking) between 2016 and 2025, over 100 hours more than the annual average in the 1990s. (Indicator 1.1.2)

Annual potential work hours lost, disaggregated by economic sector, Australia, 1990 to 2025.



ECONOMIC IMPACT

Heat exposure limits labour productivity, which undermines livelihoods and the social determinants of health.

- Heat-related labour capacity reduction in Australia caused an estimated potential earnings loss of US\$4.69 billion in 2025. Construction workers were the most affected, accounting for 63% of labour hours lost in 2025 (Indicator 4.1.3).
- The average annual monetised value of heat-related mortality among people aged over 65 in Australia was US\$1.5 billion between 2020 and 2024, equivalent to approximately 85,000 average annual incomes. This was a 119% increase compared with 2000–2004 (Indicator 4.1.2).



Heat exposure caused an average annual loss of 127 million potential labour hours between 2016 and 2025, 90% higher than the annual average in the 1990s. The construction sector accounted for almost 58% of these losses. (Indicator 1.1.3)



High night-time temperatures caused an average annual loss of 34 hours of sleep per person in Australia between 2021 and 2025, 1.4 hours more than the annual average in 1986–2005. (Indicator 1.1.4)

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Extreme heat and long heat waves de-motivate the entire community in both self-care and professional work. We experienced 40 days over 40 degrees centigrade last summer.

Anonymous, clinical health worker, Australia

Drought and Health

Drought can threaten water availability, food security and livelihoods, with consequences for health and wellbeing. In Australia, extreme drought has become substantially more widespread, placing additional pressures on water resources and agricultural production.



An average of 23% of Australia's land area experienced at least one month of extreme drought annually between 2021 and 2025, compared with 8% in 1981–1990. (Indicator 1.2.2)

Energy Transition and Health

Fossil fuel combustion contributes to harmful air pollution, increasing the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and premature mortality. Reducing dependence on polluting fuels can improve air quality and protect health, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Despite progress in renewable electricity generation, Australia's energy system remains heavily dependent on fossil fuels.



Approximately 3,900 deaths in Australia were attributable to anthropogenic fine particulate air pollution (PM_{2.5}) in 2023, a 2.4% increase from 2016. Fossil fuel combustion accounted for 51.6% of these deaths, with the transport sector contributing to 38.4% of all deaths attributable to anthropogenic PM_{2.5}. (Indicator 3.2.1)



In 2023, coal accounted for 46.7% of Australia's electricity generation, while renewable sources contributed 26.8%. The carbon intensity of Australia's overall energy system declined by 11.6% between 2016 and 2023, reaching 64.6 tCO₂/TJ. (Indicator 3.1.1)



In 2023, electricity accounted for 53.7% of household energy use in Australia. Increasing household electrification powered by renewable electricity can reduce exposure to harmful household air pollution and associated health risks. (Indicator 3.1.2)



Australia had still not adopted electricity use in the transport sector in 2023 (0.1% share). (Indicator 3.1.3)



Australia's healthcare sector emitted 19.8 million tonnes of greenhouse gases in 2023, a 17% decrease from 2016. Further reducing healthcare emissions can contribute to climate change mitigation while maintaining essential health services. (Indicator 3.5)

Vibrio and Coastal Health Risks

Rising sea surface temperatures can create more favourable conditions for *Vibrio* bacteria, increasing the risk of infections associated with exposure to coastal waters and contaminated seafood.



The length of Australia's coastline suitable for *Vibrio* transmission was 395% greater in 2025 than in 1982–1991, reaching approximately 1,600 km. Estimated vibriosis cases increased by 81% compared with 1982–1991, reaching an annual average of 63 cases between 2016 and 2025. (Indicator 1.3.6)

Northern Territory health authorities have documented serious *Vibrio* infections around the Gulf of Carpentaria, while Queensland health guidance identifies warm tropical and subtropical coastal waters as suitable environments for *Vibrio vulnificus* (Northern Territory Government, 2025; Queensland Government, 2017).

Testimonials were collected by The Geneva Learning Foundation as part of efforts to elevate health worker voices and recognize their lived experiences as valuable evidence in climate and health policy.

Romanello M, Walawender M, Israelsson J et al. The 2026 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: A decade of escalating health harms and a decisive moment for all. The Lancet 2026; published online October 2026. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(26\)01779-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(26)01779-4)
 Beggs PJ, Singh T, Bambrick H, et al. The 2026 Oceania Report of the MJA–Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change: Children Already Impacted, With a Lifetime of Exposure to Come. Medical Journal of Australia 2026; 224: e70315. <https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.70315>
 Northern Territory Government. (2025, May 23). *Vibrio* bacterial disease. NT.GOV.AU. <https://nt.gov.au/wellbeing/health-conditions/vibrio-bacterial-disease>
 Queensland Government. (2017, September 7). *Vibrio vulnificus* infection. Queensland Government. <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/condition/infections-and-parasites/bacterial-infections/vibrio-vulnificus-infection>

